

COMMON DILEMMAS IN FAMILY MEDICINE. Edited by John Fry. (Pp xiv + 401, Illustrated. £15.95). Lancaster, Lancs: MTP Press, 1983.

I enjoyed reading this book. John Fry, the well-known general practitioner from the South of England has assembled over fifty general practitioners, almost half of them from various parts of the English-speaking world. He has asked them to look at a score of dilemmas a family doctor will certainly meet in his clinical or administrative work. For each of the dilemmas, one or more of the authors address the various issues involved, usually substantiating their arguments with references from work in that particular field. When the case has been made for and against, the chapter ends with a commentary. This is a short and usually balanced critique from Dr Fry and his two closest collaborators, Dr Wes Fabb from Australia and Professor John Geyman from the United States, both of whom are well known in the postgraduate and undergraduate fields respectively.

Being often taught on 'extreme' cases as a student, the general practitioner then practices in relative isolation with patients who do not exhibit disorders in their classical forms and, in any case, are individuals with their own views, part of a family and community. More than others he has to work in the grey areas of uncertainty and make decisions as well as help patients make decisions for their own good. This book attempts to encompass the precise technical assessment as well as the personal hunch and shows that divergent views are tenable on a variety of topics.

Many issues are discussed — when to treat moderate hypertension, where to treat acute myocardial infarction, what to tell dying patients, how to manage alcoholic patients. Day-to-day decisions about antibiotics, psychotropic drugs, teamwork, numbers of patients, policy on house calls are just a few of the chapters in this interesting book.

The reader will not finish this work in one sitting. Indeed it will provide a source which can be returned to several times. Authors are to be found on the opposite side of an argument to that which they usually occupy, though this does not detract from their usual cogency. Given more space and the right price, I believe that further dilemmas could with advantage, be added — repeat prescriptions, out-of-hours calls; non-accidental injury to children, abortion, compliance with medication, management of breast cancer etc. Postgraduate GP students as well as trainers will obviously relish this book but I believe that significant amounts of undergraduate learning would be rehabilitated by the approach of this book.

PMR

THE HEALTH CARE MANUAL. By John Fry and Gordon Fryers. (Pp 320. £3.95). Lancaster, Lancs: MTP Press, 1983.

THIS book largely succeeds in portraying as clearly as possible the wide range of products available for self-care and their various uses. As a reference book it may still be daunting to some patients because of the depth of knowledge displayed albeit in simple terms. Many under-privileged patients are not leisure time readers and would need to be frequently stimulated to buy the book. The book gives belated recognition to the fact that self care should be an important facet of medical care. Section 4 of the book is less readable and less easy to resource. Products are listed in considerable detail in the general index. Some, in bold print, give use and side effects and others, in small print, offer a wide selection but omit full details of use etc. The success of the book in terms of achieving the aims of its authors will depend upon its acceptability in practice as a quick easy reference, when people feel the need for medical advice for common ailments. This review expresses some reservations about the type of patient who is likely to benefit. Nevertheless the authors have gone a long way towards helping many to cope better with illness by listing useful information, which they can resource fairly easily in time of need.

WGI

THE NATURE AND NURTURE OF TWINS. By Elizabeth M. Bryan. (Pp 223. £9.95). London: Baillière Tindall, 1983.

THE author, a paediatrician, has drawn on her considerable experience of this subject to produce a readable and informative book. It is written primarily for paediatricians but there is much to interest all who are concerned with the care and management of twins. The book provides a comprehensive overview of twinning with emphasis on the practical, financial and emotional problems which devolve on a mother and the rest of the family in looking after two babies at the same time. Growth and development, schooling, handicap or death of a twin and adoption are some of the subjects discussed. An extensive and helpful list of references is also provided.

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